

BUREAU OF ENVIRONMENT CONFERENCE REPORT

SUBJECT: Monthly SHPO-FHWA-ACOE-NHDOT Cultural Resources Meeting

DATE OF CONFERENCES: February 11, 2021

LOCATION OF CONFERENCE: John O. Morton Building

Due to the Covid 19 Event, this meeting was a scheduled Zoom Meeting

ATTENDED BY:

NHDOT

Sheila Charles

Ron Crickard

Jill Edelmann

Jon Evans

Marc Laurin

Nancy Spaulding

FHWA

Jamie Sikora

HNTB

Ray Hanf

NHDHR/NHDNCR

Laura Black

David Trubey

Normandeau

Lee Carbonneau

PROJECTS/PRESENTATIONS REVIEWED THIS MONTH:

(minutes on subsequent pages)

Dover-Rochester 29440, RPR 12033 (no federal funding) 1

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Participants: Lee Carbonneau, Normandeau; Ray Hanf, HNTB; Jon Evans, Nancy Spaulding, NHDOT

After participant introductions, Jon Evans introduced the Dover-Rochester All Electronic Tolling (AET) project, which involves converting the existing Spaulding Turnpike toll plazas in Dover and Rochester to high speed toll facilities with no cash lanes.

Ray Hanf of HNTB provided an overview of the project scope and purpose. The scope includes replacement of aging toll infrastructure with all electronic tolling infrastructure, construction of median concrete barrier, construction of water quality features and drainage systems, rehabilitation of pavement, and in Rochester, construction of wood panel soundwalls. The purpose of the project is to reduce energy use and vehicle emissions, improve safety and mobility, replace deteriorated toll infrastructure and automate collection operations. Aerial and ground photographs showing existing toll facilities in both Cities were shown, including the Dr. Belknap historical marker. A photo of an overhead AET gantry similar to the ones that will be constructed in Dover and Rochester was also shown. Current construction cost is estimated at \$18.75 million, with \$5.5 million of that cost attributed to soundwalls in Rochester. The schedule calls for construction bid advertising in May 2021, and a construction season from late summer of 2021 through spring of 2023.

The Request for Project Review (RPR) and the individual inventory forms prepared by Preservation Company were discussed. Jill Edelmann noted that both of the toll plazas were determined to be Eligible, but not the Turnpike itself, as there have been many changes to the roadway over the years. The question of the soundwalls was discussed in more detail. Laura Black asked if this project creates new noise impacts or if soundwalls were considered previously, and whether or not the soundwalls would impact adjacent properties.

Jon Evans explained that NHDOT follows the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) rules for noise impacts for both state and federal projects so that noise mitigation is equally applied throughout the state. This project appeared to meet FHWA criteria for noise analysis as a “substantial alteration to a toll facility”. No other work on this part of the Turnpike in Rochester has occurred since the FHWA rules were first enacted in 1996, so this project was the first opportunity to address these rules. Existing noise levels exceed the 66 dBA noise abatement/impact criteria for residential areas, but this project will not introduce new sources of noise. There will be a decrease in noise resulting from truck deceleration, acceleration, and compression braking noise, which are often viewed by the public as particularly disturbing, however there will also be an increase in tire/pavement noise due to the increased vehicle speeds through the area of the existing toll plaza.

The residential properties closest to the soundwall were briefly discussed. Some of these homes are of the same vintage as the toll plazas. Jon Evans noted that while some characteristics of the noise environment will change as vehicles will no longer have to decelerate and accelerate to go through the plaza, these changes will ultimately not result in any noticeable increases in noise to the residences adjacent to the highway. Furthermore, the noise mitigation provided by the soundwalls will provide a noticeable decrease in noise levels to numerous residences located behind the soundwall. There is also a forested buffer between residences and the proposed soundwalls. Jill and Laura agreed that documenting this soundwall discussion in the meeting minutes was sufficient, but that NHDOT may also want to address this issue as they work on their technical memo guidance document.

Jill began the mitigation discussion, noting that demolition of the toll plaza facilities is an obvious adverse effect. Development of interpretive panels was discussed as the mitigation approach. The panels should address the history of the Spaulding Turnpike, the architects of the toll facilities, and provide historical photographs assembled by Preservation Company. Potential locations for the panels was discussed. Jill suggested the John O. Morton building in Concord, the new Turnpike Building in Hooksett off the FE Everett Turnpike, and the Hampton-Seabrook rest area on I-95. The Concord and Hooksett sites would be available primarily for interested NHDOT employees, while the Hampton-Seabrook rest area could be targeted for the travelling public. Nancy Spaulding noted that the Hooksett Turnpike building will have a conference room intended for use by non-Turnpike personnel as well, such as the State Police, Department of Safety (and others), once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted. Laura noted that the fascinating information and photos developed by Preservation Company should be available to as much of the travelling public as possible, and panels developed for public locations should be eye-catching and include photos. She asked about other potential locations, such as pullouts and park-and-rides. Nancy noted there is a park-and-ride in Dover, and also suggested the Hooksett welcome centers. David noted that a similar facility to the Hooksett welcome center may be coming to the Hampton-Seabrook rest area, but Nancy noted that this will be owned and operated by the Liquor Commission. Jon suggested that an interpretive panel in Hooksett on the Everett Turnpike should perhaps include more than just the Spaulding Turnpike history, which prompted a discussion of interpretive panel content. Laura noted that the Spaulding Turnpike plazas were replicated for the Everett Turnpike (now long gone), so are still relevant. She also suggested an overview panel, addressing overall turnpike history in the state, with turnpike-specific details at turnpike sites.

Jill identified the next steps. NHDOT will continue working on the mitigation plan, and will draft the adverse effects memo. Discussion ensued regarding whether the consultation process should follow Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and result in a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) or follow the

state process under RSA Chapter 227-C and result in a Memorandum of Understanding. This is not a federal project, and Jon noted that while the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is identified as the lead federal agency on the RPR, they declined to participate in the MOA/MOU, reasoning they have no jurisdiction since wetland impacts are associated with soundwalls, not historical resources. Ron Crickard stated that the Construction General Permit (CGP) needed from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) does not identify Section 106 as the mechanism for historical consultation, and EPA has also declined to take the lead. It was agreed that the Section 106 and 227-C processes are similar, and as there is no federal agency to sign an MOA, the 227-C process will be followed and an MOU developed.